Project:

ICTY ORAL History - Documented by SENSE

An Interview with

Stefanie Frease

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Interviewers: Mirko Klarin (MK), Mina Vidaković (MV)

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MK: In 1992 you had already been in Bosnia and Croatia?

SF: I think it was a part of my destiny. I have maternal grandparents who are from the Balkans. My father is American but he took a great interest in the former Yugoslavia and did academic studies that focused on the former Yugoslavia. So he took us there as a family when I was five years old and 10 years old. And then I went back when I was 16. I was in high school in Split. That was 1980, it was September of 1980, so Tito had died six months earlier. There was a lot of conversation and a lot of uncertainty about what would happen. The host family that I was living with, they were friends of ours, and they said something one evening about the possibility of war coming to the country. And it was just in that moment that I thought: "Oh well, if there's war I'll be here". It was a powerful thought but that's as far as it went. And about 10 years later the war started to seem like it was going to happen. It seemed that conflict was going to come to the region. And so I switched directions. I had been involved in business and thought that I would have a career in international business, but then I switched directions and I went to graduate school in New York, at Columbia University. That was in January 1992. And by April the war had started in Bosnia. So I was in New York then, attending various meetings and of course reading the newspaper every day. By October of that year I was hired by a humanitarian organization to

go to Croatia. That was with the International Rescue Committee. It's a non-profit organization that's based in New York City. I was hired out of my academic program to go there and I spent a couple of years in Croatia and Bosnia and also in Serbia, traveling and as a kind of liaison. And I worked on mental health issues in Sarajevo. Then I applied for work at the Tribunal. I was injured in Bosnia. I had a burn accident, a small camping stove exploded in my hands and it took the skin off of my arms and my legs and my face. I spent several months back home in Seattle recovering. My mom really wanted me to stay in Seattle and sell real estate or do something else, and I just said: "I don't know why, but I've got to go back". So I guess it just felt as if things were not finished for me there.

MK: You met important people in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia. I've heard from some reliable sources that you went to Sarajevo in an APC with Richard Holbrooke?

SF: Yes, we did. At the time Richard Holbrooke was on the board of the International Rescue Committee. He was not in government at the time but he was, I think it's fair to say, interested in getting back into government and he was very interested in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and understanding it better. So he planned a trip to the Balkans and I travelled with him a couple of times. In December of 1992 we travelled from Split up through Mostar to Zenica and Vitez where IRC had an office. Then we met one of his friends Lionel Rosenblatt in Zenica, in the big cavernous hotel there. Lionel and Sylvana Foa, spokesperson for the UN at the time, they were planning to go into Sarajevo the next day. He didn't have an ID, I think I did at the time have an ID, because you needed the UN passes to get in. So we made him an ID and got in an APC the next day and went into Sarajevo. That was the 31st of December 1992. We stayed at the Holiday Inn. It was... I don't know if I

would say the height of the war but it was very intense fighting and sniper activity along "sniper alley". We were shot at that night. He and Lionel stayed in one room and I stayed in another room with Sylvana and a couple of other women. We went to a party at the Hole in the Wall. Mirza Tokača organized it. It was a good party, it was a good New Year's Eve party. So much vitality and exuberance. People talk about this all the time, but, yeah, the people of Sarajevo had a very special kind of zest and a desire to have fun and to live and to survive and to have a good time in that moment despite everything that was happening around. So it was in some ways sort of a surrealistic moment of all of this joy and all kinds of fear and angst.

MK: What kind of practical work was done by the International Rescue Committee?

SF: IRC in Sarajevo at the time was focusing a lot on water and gas. It also opened several counseling centers, mostly for women, where women could go and talk about what either they had experienced or what they were experiencing. Those are the main projects that I remember right now.

MK: Then you went back to Seattle and you wanted to go back?

SF: I was injured at the end of September 1994 and I went back in I think it was about March of 1995... I was in Seattle that whole time and then I went back to the former Yugoslavia. And back to Sarajevo, back to see friends and just to see what was next for me. And in the interim I had applied for work at the ICTY and was interviewed while I was away. During that trip I also went down to Kosovo and Montenegro just because I was curious about what was happening in the region. So it was while I was down in Kosovo that I got a call and was interviewed and then I came to The Hague at the end of April 1995.

MK: So, when you came to The Hague what was your first task?

SF: I was hired by the Office of the Prosecutor and the first job that I was given was to go through a box of captured documents and videotape and photographs. These were documents that were captured by the Bosnian Army of a Serb town. It had changed hands a few times during the war. It was a town outside of Sarajevo. So the last time that the town turned over the Bosnian military took it and captured these documents. So my job was to go through the box and to see what was in there. And I developed a little database or someone helped me develop a database that would help in the analysis. One of the documents that was the most important was this Varijanta A and B document. Variation A and B was a document that was produced by the SDS, the Serb Democratic Party, and it was a kind of template about how officials in different municipalities should behave towards minority populations. So in municipalities where the Serbs were the majority how they should deal with the minority population, and if they were not in the majority in a municipality then other ways that they should deal with the situation in those municipalities. So that was my first assignment. I worked on that in May and June. And then in early July the offensive started on the Srebrenica enclave and I went into the director of investigations office one day and was asked whether I would be part of a small kind of an advance mission, though I don't think they called it that at the time, but just this team of four people to go to Tuzla, Northern Bosnia, to see whether we could find any witnesses, any individuals who had survived mass executions. During that time my colleagues and I were going to work in the daytime, coming home at night turning on CNN and watching what was happening with the fall of the UN enclave that the Dutch military was there to protect and defend. At that time on CNN there was daily coverage of the events in Bosnia, not just in July of 1995, but there

was a lot of coverage about the war. And so going home every night watching the news, seeing that people were making very serious allegations about mass executions that were taking place of men and boys from Srebrenica and interviews of women who had been transported out by bus along the main road from Potočari to Bratunac to Konjević Polje and out, and them saying that they had seen hundreds or even thousands of men gathered at certain points along that road, and that they didn't know what had happened to them. So we were seeing that. I remember watching those interviews and I also remember watching an interview I think it was Jovan Zametica, the spokesperson for Radovan Karadžić, who denied that any murders had taken place. So it was in that context that then I was asked to participate in this mission to Tuzla.

MK: When exactly did you come to Tuzla? So who was in the team?

SF: Jean-René Ruez was the French investigator who was the team leader. Super dynamic, smart guy to lead the team. A guy named Matthew Hodes who had been a UN civil affairs officer. And then we had a Bosnian Muslim police officer.... He was based in Sarajevo, he was helping to open the office for the ICTY in Sarajevo, and then myself.

MK: Can you describe your time in Tuzla.

SF: So, we left The Hague on the 21st of July. I think we went through Zagreb and got into Tuzla. And then we stayed with a woman, the four of us stayed in a house in Tuzla. Our main point of contact was the SDB in Tuzla, the secret police. I guess they would have been a CSB, sort of a regional police center. Anyway, they were our main point of contact. And we

spent time out at the tarmac in Tuzla where thousands of women and children had been accommodated in UNHCR tents, the blue tents, thousands of people. So we went out there and we met people. We also reached out to various organizations within Tuzla, women's organizations and others who may have additional information about people who were coming across the front lines and who had information that they wanted to convey.

MK: They could mainly testify or give statements about evacuation, how it happened, how they had been gathered in buses and taken from Potočari to Kladanj. But at that time you didn't have any survivors of the mass executions yet, I suppose?

SF: Let me think. While we were there we did meet some survivors of the mass executions. The four of us did not interview anyone in July of 1995. The interviews with survivors and others started in August 1995. One thing that was very helpful and important was the work that the police did in Tuzla in gathering information as men were coming across the front line. They created a small form that was just small pieces of paper, about this big, with about five questions. And the questions were - what's your name, your father's name, your date of birth, where are you from, did you see any atrocities or did you see any crimes being committed and where do you plan to be now, in other words how can we contact you again. Because they were conducting these interviews with men as they were coming across the front line. They went out and interviewed them. So actually when we arrived in Tuzla they already had dozens of statements of people that we could review and then decide whether or not we wanted to interview them. So the Bosnian police official who was a part of our team, the four of us, so there were two of us who spoke the language and so he and I spent a good number of days in where we were staying and just reading and

reading and reading these statements and trying to understand something about the chronology of what happened to these men. And in the meantime JR, Jean-René Ruez, and Matt Hodes were also making other contacts with people in the community to try to develop additional information. It was during that first trip though that we did start to meet people who were survivors.

MK: How many interviews did you do, approximately? Do you remember some details from those interviews with refugees which affected you personally?

SF: My Bosnian colleague and I were pretty affected. I was very affected by the statements that I was reading, in particular about the journey that the men took through the woods. There were ambushes, and they were at night and they. The men were able to describe in alarming detail the horrors that they were going through, and mostly at night. And it was the first night that they were in the woods, this long column of about fifteen thousand men, moving from... they started in a small town Šušnjari, up from Srebrenica, and then they walked through the woods and it was before they got to the main intersection, it was still up in the hills, where the first ambushes were. So they described in a lot of detail the horror of that and some of the murders that took place. Some of them were just man-to-man and not simply grenades landing and injuring people from afar. So the way that that first mission went was that part way through Jean-René left Tuzla to go back to The Hague to get some criminal investigators to come back with him and some interpreters to come back with him. So he left, we remained and kept going through statements identifying more people we would need to interview. And then he came back and a couple of investigators came with him and a couple of interpreters. And it was during

that time I remember him conducting one interview in particular with one of the survivors from the dam, a young boy, a teenager who still had injuries on him from what he had experienced. So medical appointments were made with the doctor so that x-rays could be taken and his injuries confirmed. It was overwhelming to hear about everything that was happening, and to be completely unfamiliar with the names of places, and to try to make sense of distances and whether a particular situation that one person talked about was the same thing that another one talked about or whether they were different events. We started from scratch, we had no knowledge of what was going on. It was also during that first mission that we heard about other survivors from what turned out to be a different mass execution site, the one at Lazete or Orahovac, Grbavci, that's all the same one. But again it was hard to know whether they were talking about the same location or these were different locations. And if they were different locations how many were there. So you start at one place and you just keep pulling the thread or you keep digging it, whatever kind of analogy makes sense to you, to arrive at the enormity of what Srebrenica was. For me personally, it was really hard for me to believe that the regular Serb military did this. I thought it must have been rogue paramilitaries or rogue forces who would commit such crimes. A part of that incredulity on my part was based on a myth about the Serbian people and Serbs, that they stand up for the little guy and don't cause harm. There's this kind of heroic sense of Serbs as a people - and what the news reports were showing was completely contradictory. It sounds extremely naive, even as I speak the words in this moment, knowing everything that had been going on during the war, but still in my mind it was unfathomable that the Serb military would have committed murders on such a scale.

MK: For how long did you stay in Tuzla?

SF: I was there about three weeks, three or four weeks.

MK: And then you came back and you'd been redirected to your documentation?

SF: That's right, I was back to my box of documentation.

MK: And Jean-René he stopped?

SF: You know, I did not know how pissed off he was until a lot later. I think it's fair to say he wasn't pissed off at me. But he was alone when he got back to The Hague after that mission. So he came back to The Hague, got more people, went back to Tuzla and I don't know when they finished, maybe towards the end of August. So the whole fall he spent alone analyzing the witness statements that he and other investigators from the ICTY took. And he was alone in creating the chronology and really understanding the events.

MK: That's why the Srebrenica team was called "the ghost team"?

SF: Yes. In January 1996 I ran into him in the hallway. By then I had finished my project and I had been reassigned to another case that I wasn't particularly excited about working on. And he stopped me in the hallway and said: "What are you doing?". I said: "I've been reassigned and you know..." And he said: "Do you want to work with me on Srebrenica?" I said: "Yes!". And that was it. I went to John Ralston, he was a commander then of the Serb teams, and so I got reassigned. I think at that point Jean-René had one other investigator working with him, a Pakistani police official Assif Sayed, and then I joined. Right, JR called it "the ghost team" I think as a double meaning of the ghosts of all of those who had perished after the fall of Srebrenica and because there was virtually no team.

MK: If we ever make this film, the title will be "The ghost team digging for genocide

without corpses". Which is the second part of the story...

SF: Oh boy, that got him going!

MK: Can you explain why at that time Srebrenica was so neglected by the people who run the OTP, Goldstone was still there…

SF: You have to ask a lot of different people that question. I'm not sure that I can provide the answer to that. What I can offer is some perspective and some context about what was happening in the Office of the Prosecutor at the time. Some of the context was that the OTP was still very small. When I arrived in April of 1995, and you should go back and check if there's some way to check the numbers, but I think that in the whole Tribunal in April of 1995 there were few hundred people, like maybe two or three hundred. Do you know Maya? So, there were 300 people in the entire ICTY - that's Registry, the judges and the Office of the Prosecutor. And the OTP was focused... Imagine, you start up a new court, a new tribunal of a conflict. You're bringing people in from all different parts of the world who have no background in that conflict. They are professionals, they bring skill sets, but most of them did not bring a knowledge of the conflict of the former Yugoslavia. And the Tribunal really got started in fall of 1994 even though it was set up in early 1993. So it took a year and a half or so for the infrastructure to get put together and for the first people to start arriving in fall of 1994. So by the summer of 1995 there was a skeleton group of people who had been brought together to create the structure of the entire court, including the Office of the Prosecutor. So... maybe there were a hundred people working for the Office of the Prosecutor, not even.

MK: 30.

SF: 30?

MK: In 1995 there were 30 people. At the same time in Belgium there was Affaire Dutroux, the serial rapist, and 330 people were working on that case.

SF: That's it! That's it! Truly, in the OTP there was this feeling of David and Goliath. A very strong feeling of wanting to do good work and yet being very overwhelmed by the enormity of the crimes that had been committed.

MK: But still, Jean-René was "jealous" of one other team, investigating a massacre in Lašva valley, that had 11 members.

SF: Yeah. There was a team also at some point, maybe in 1997 or 1998, that had 30 members of a team -and we were six people. So yes, there was that. But I think in some way it sort of made us stronger or made us more focused or made us pull together in a way that other teams weren't able to in the same way. I think a lot of credit goes to Jean-René, without a doubt. He has so much energy, he's so intelligent, so charismatic, tremendous work ability, tremendous focus and ability to connect with people and to see what was relevant and what was not relevant in such a case. So even in July of 1995 when we were out there in Tuzla we heard that there were radio intercepted communications that had been gathered and no one would talk to us about it. There were little bits and pieces here and there, but nothing that was of any significance. As time went on we didn't forget about that. For sure in 1997 he was putting in requests and just kept putting in requests until finally one day they said: "Okay, we're ready to talk about that information".

MK: On one side you have been neglected by the OTP, on the other it seemed that at

the beginning you were obstructed on the ground by the IFOR.

MK: At the beginning they were suspicious, "what are they doing?", they were treating them like a kind of NGO. Did you get all the help you needed from the international forces when the investigation really started there?

SF: Yes.

MK: The multinational character of the team is something which also gave it some importance and strength. From how many countries did forensic experts participate? Do you have a number? Including exhumations, investigation, identifications and so on. It was a really global team.

SF: I guess I want to go back to early 1996. A lot started to happen. So to put the whole thing in context, because I think it's always really important to think about context: July 1995 the fall of Srebrenica, November of 1995 the Dayton Peace Agreement, December it gets formally signed, and then in early 1996 international forces go into Bosnia to keep the peace. So that created some stability on the ground. When we were there in July 1995 the war was still going on. We couldn't imagine at that time when we would be able to actually get to the crime scenes. And other teams were having that kind of difficulty. So early 1996 I joined JR and then he started to plan a mission in the spring to actually go to the crime scenes. Initially he wasn't going to take me because I was still injured, I was still wearing these gloves on my hands, and I was a girl, you know, "what would I be wanting to do in investigating anything on the ground there in Eastern Bosnia?". And when I asked him about going as well, he said: "Oh! You would want to go?" I said: "Yes!". So from then on I was included in all of the field missions. The other thing that happened in spring of 1996 is

that Dražen Erdemović came forward. That was an enormous event for the investigation, because Dražen Erdemović spoke about Branjevo farm, about actively personally participating in the massacres that occurred there on that day. And then not only that but he told us about the Dom kulture, the cultural center in Pilica where another 500 or so men were killed. We know now the current number is 1751 men who were murdered on the 16th of July 1995 in Branjevo farm, in Pilica and at the cultural center. And at that time I think Dražen Erdemović spoke about approximately 1200 men having been killed at the Branjevo farm, which turned out to be very accurate. And then, also in the spring, because there was interest from the US administration, JR was taken on a trip into Republika Srpska with John Shattuck. I think he also traveled with Madeleine Albright. Either it was one trip or two trips, I don't remember. Two trips? Okay. So in those two trips he made progress on the investigation by being able to go to the Kravica warehouse, where 1385 people were killed on the 13th of July 1995. That was a place early on when... So, JR had those trips into Republika Srpska early in 1996 and then we had our first field mission into Republika Srpska and stayed at Camp Lisa - I think it was called Camp Lisa or Camp Doble, JR would know - with the US military. And they provided security to us when we went out to the various sites to try to identify and locate places that survivors of the mass executions talked about. So, all of this was happening very quickly. When we had those first field missions we ramped up the team, so Jean-René was able to pull people in from various teams so we had a sort of increased ghost team when we were in the field and then we would come back and kind of revert back to our smaller group. But nonetheless I guess it threw some creativity and a whole lot of drive that we were still able to get the work done.

MK: You mentioned Erdemović and there have been two more guilty pleas. Did you

participate in the interviews with those people, Obrenović, Nikolić? How important were they, apart from Erdemović who was the first one, for making the full circle of the story and connecting the loose ends in the investigation?

SF: I was present for the first suspect interviews that we did in Banja Luka. I didn't participate in subsequent ones, so I can't take any credit for Obrenović or Nikolić.

SF: I don't think it can be overstated how important it was for Dragan Obrenović and Momir Nikolić to plead guilty. They provided insight and facts and details into what happened during those days. I just think it takes a tremendous amount of courage and it takes a lot of personal strength to come forward and to talk about the facts. I wish that many, many, many more people in the former Yugoslavia in the context of ICTY would have had that same level of courage. We need facts, we need transparency, we need to open up the space for conversation about things that occurred.

MK: As far as I've heard, and I think Jean-René told me so, only one mass grave in Srebrenica area was found thanks to a local Serb who told the investigators where the grave was, where the bodies were. But all others were found by Jean-René using aerial imagery and investigating on the ground. Jean-René used the term omerta, a Sicilian mafia's term, to explain the attitude of the people in the local communities, say in Bratunac or Kravica or Pilica - nobody saw anything, knew nothing. How do you see that?

SF: I think the Serbs put a lot of fear into Serbs at the beginning of the war to not object to the atrocities that were being committed. And when you put fear into people, they were killed, that's a whole different segment of conversation that deserves to happen. You can easily scare people enough to make them not want to speak. And by July of 1995 people

had a lot of reason to be fearful.

MK: You had a special role in the investigation which was to analyze the intercepts. You said in one of your testimonies that at the beginning you were skeptical, especially having in mind that you didn't get audio recordings of the intercepts and that it took Jean-René almost three years to convince the AID or whoever, Bosnian Army, to give you those transcripts. Can you tell me how you worked with it and how you established that they were credible and authentic?

SF: I think we were all skeptical about the radio intercepted communication initially. And I would say that it was a healthy skepticism because I think that what in some ways was, I don't want to say completely unique to the Srebrenica team, but some qualities that we had, each of us, was that we cared so much about the facts. We just wanted the facts. And we were dedicated to following the facts and letting the facts then speak for themselves. So I felt that very strongly, and I knew that if there was ever a time when I would need to be in the courtroom that I needed to feel absolutely convinced and a hundred percent sure that the material that I would testify about was absolutely solid. So it was that sort of skepticism that drove me and our team to really want to dig into those intercepts thoroughly, to pull them apart, to try to discredit them ourselves in order to see whether or not they were valid. So I did start from a place of skepticism and then in the process of working on them for more than two years and approaching them from all different angles and trying to poke holes in their validity and the veracity of the information that was contained in them, that at the end of the day they were absolutely reliable and authentic, in my opinion. I don't even need to say "in my opinion" - they were reliable and

authentic. So, a part of that process was understanding whether the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina that intercepted that communication, whether the unit that was responsible for gathering that information, had a process itself in how they collected the information. And they did. It's probably not very interesting to talk about process, I find process really interesting because I think that in process you see the weight of something, you really can follow it in any direction if there's process. So they had a good process. The men who were in that unit were trained and they were dedicated to the process. And the process involved recording conversations that they believed to be important. It was wartime, supplies were limited, but when they tuned into a conversation they believed to be important they recorded it, and usually after they gathered one, two, three, four conversations then they would transcribe them by hand into these child's notebooks. Those were the only supplies that they had at the time during the war. And that process started for them in the fall, winter of 1994. So they had had this process of having these notebooks for a good six, seven, eight months at the time of the events of July 1995. Before that they wrote information on pieces of paper that weren't kept in a very deliberate and organized manner, I would say. But in July 1995 they had those notebooks and so they would transcribe the conversations in there. Then they would get typed up and they would get sent to headquarters. So we looked at the typed conversations and the notebooks and then we did get some tape recordings as well and compared how the language came through in those transcriptions. But some of the instructions that the unit members were given to me were very important, for example, don't guess about anything, don't make your own assumptions about anything, if you don't know who's speaking in the call you put x and y, if you believe you recognize a voice because you've heard that voice over months or years so you

recognize the voice but it doesn't come up in the conversation then that could be person x speaking, in parentheses the name of the person who's speaking. And that was a very consistent process that all of those operators used. So to me it gave a lot of validity to the process. And when they couldn't hear something they would write dot-dot-dot... I mean, I guess it's just 'no guessing'.

MK: Mladić or Drinski korpus kept all the documents about the movement of personal cars, heavy machines and so on, which is something that we didn't expect that people during that kind of war will do. They almost implemented the procedure which is acceptable to the court. Did they work with the idea that it may one day appear in court?

SF: I don't think that they had that in mind when they were recording these conversations. As with the whole investigation it was a step-by-step process. I think that one thing that turned out to be very important for the investigation was that as a team we focused for the first two years or so on developing the crime base. So we had a very detailed knowledge of what was happening, where and when. That was the foundation. Then we started to focus, which I would say really started in early 1998 when we started to focus more on who was responsible. Because Erdemović, even though he provided some good information and we knew who the people were who participated with him on that day, we did not know how the order was passed down or who the lieutenant colonel was at Branjevo farm who they picked up at the Zvornik brigade headquarters on their way up north, they were coming from Vlasenica. We didn't know who the colonel was who was there. There was a lot we didn't know. But we had developed a very strong crime base, so in early 1998 we were ready to go to the next level, to begin to focus on who was responsible

for the crimes. And that strong crime base helped us a lot, because when we got the radio intercepted communication we already knew a lot of the names of various locations. We had a structure to put that information into. We had a body of personal knowledge that helped to analyze the information that was then coming through in the radio intercepted communication. And that was really important. So I guess even in the process of analyzing the intercepted communication we started with some printouts. They gave us a binder of 550 pages that provided the backbone of the analysis for the radio intercepted communication. From that binder of 550 pages then we got these notebooks that the conversations were written into by all of these various operators during that couple week period of time. Then we started cross-referencing everything. A lot of this work was very tedious, very time consuming. It was cross-referencing. And we started to notice that sometimes a conversation would come up that seemed to be recorded a couple of times and in some cases even three times. So that raised questions about how is that possible, why would that happen, what was going on. So another step in the process of understanding the intercepted communication was developing that foundation first, and then getting permission to interview the radio intercept operators. Once we started interviewing them and talking to them about their process then we understood that there were two different intercept sites. That was also really important because that was the reason that a couple of conversations were recorded at the same time. And then, like I said, in some cases there were even three, because there were multiple units at one location. So any of the questions that we raised were explainable. That also contributed to the validity and the reliability and the authenticity of the radio intercepted communication.

MV: Why do you think it took so much time for them to deliver those documents to

you?

SF: I think that the time lapse, the three years that it took to get that information, was based on the war, the end of the war and then not wanting to reveal methods. This was very sensitive information and the Bosnian military did not want to give up intelligence. Intelligence people always talk about sources and methods, right? So they didn't want to give up information that potentially could harm the military or harm the country. But three years into it enough time had passed and there was enough new stability or enough stability in a post-war Bosnia that the military felt comfortable at that point handing over that sensitive information.

MK: Were you sure that they didn't use that time to doctor it?

SF: That's correct. The passage of time, the three years that it took us to get that information, did create those doubts of "have they just been busy?" But the way that we addressed that concern was to find information that could corroborate the facts contained within the intercepted communication from sources that were completely outside of that. That was fascinating because we had military documents and one of them, I'm remembering one now that was on the 13th of July when there are a couple of people and there are a couple of conversations like this where they're talking about there having been a thousand or fifteen hundred people gathered in Nova Kasaba, at the soccer field, football pitch in Nova Kasaba. So it's two people talking and one of them is saying in one of the conversations: "I'm going to be sending a telegram, it's going to go over everything", sort of "don't let anybody go, make sure that they're held there at the soccer field". Then there was a military document that was sent by the head of the, I think it was the 65th Protection

Regiment that was based in Nova Kasaba, right there by the football stadium or football field, and it went through and picked up several of the points that were in that conversation. So this was a Bosnian Serb Army document dated on the 13th of July. The telegram was originally written at 2 in the afternoon I think and it was sent at 3:10 in the afternoon, and it outlined a number of the points that were in that intercepted call. In addition to that we had aerial imagery from the 13th of July at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon that showed men gathered at the soccer field in Nova Kasaba. So we corroborated information contained within the intercepts in a number of different ways. And that was also a very important part of the analysis process of the radio intercepted communication. It was sort of a final process. I'm not sure that we would have even gotten to that point if all of the rest of the stuff hadn't aligned, but everything came together.

MK: Can you remember some other intercepts which made very important evidence?

SF: The first conversation that I remember thinking, "okay, this stuff may be valid, there may be something real here" was in the summer of 1998 when we were working on translating that first binder of material. We were in Sarajevo and I was working with a small group of translators and came across this conversation on the 16th of July at 13:58 in the afternoon when they were talking about 500 liters of D2 fuel going to Pilica and the fuel was needed for lieutenant colonel Popović. Before that moment we had not known what that lieutenant colonel's name was at Pilica farm. But in that moment I thought, "that's it, it's lieutenant colonel Popović!" So I tried to call Jean-René Ruez and I tried to call Peter McCloskey who were in the field. I think they were at some exhumation sites in that

moment and I could not get across what I was trying to get across to with them. So I just, we shared it amongst ourselves. But it was a very important moment because we knew what happened in Pilica at Branjevo farm on the 16th of July. That was the information that Erdemović had provided. While he said he did not know the name of that lieutenant colonel it did come through in that intercept. So that was the first one. Then there were also a couple more. On the 15th of July, there was one regarding colonel Ljubo Beara, who was a pivotal figure in the organization and execution of these massacres. It was about 10 in the morning I think on the 15th of July where he was having a conversation with colonel Krstić, who was head of the Drina Corps, and he was asking him for I think 10 to 30 additional men, that he needed them and he would give them back that night. And he was speaking sort of urgently and really trying to persuade general Krstić that he really needed these people. And he said: "I still have 3500 parcels to deliver", so that was 3500 men left that needed to be executed. So that was another important one. There were many and there were also...you know, sort of reviewing a small number of conversations you can see the plan being carried out.

MK: So what to conclude? What makes the Srebrenica investigation so special? We are now talking of the biggest and most successful criminal investigation in the post-WWII Europe, taken its crime scene was 2800 square kilometers.

SF: We had a real sense of purpose and we all felt it. We all brought certain skill sets. And we were able to come together and to keep the mission in front, and have it and the witnesses be the primary focus that we were all working toward, and the facts. In Jean-René Ruez we had an incredible leader. He had the energy and clarity and compassion and

charisma and drive to keep the focus where it needed to be, which was on the facts. We all understood that. And I guess that focus just never deviated. So that even when people in the first team started to leave and new people came in it's as if the DNA that was imprinted in the team was so strong that the new people who came in either fit in with it and just kept that going or they didn't stay very long. Sometimes I think that with a different leader it may have been easy to say that it would be too hard to pursue every lead that came up, it was too overwhelming, the number of people and investigators working on the matter were too few in number to handle the scope and the complexity of the crime. But we never had that opinion. We never adopted that viewpoint. I think if it had been led by someone else I think it's possible that that could have happened. But even in the spring, this really surprises me, already in May of 1996 we were conducting exhumations. Jean-René knew intuitively from the very beginning that we needed to have bodies if we were going to prove the crime. He made sure that Bill Haglund, who had been conducting exhumations and autopsies in Rwanda, came from Rwanda to Bosnia in the late spring of 1996 and started to exhume some of the mass graves. We just never accepted that it was too big. No corners were cut. We knew what the work entailed and were willing to do whatever it took to get to the bottom of all of it. And I think that in the years that Peter McCloskey led the trial team, and was so dedicated to the facts and to knowing, understanding the crime scene and the evidence that the witnesses had to convey, that it was a group of people who just wouldn't stop until as many facts as were available were revealed.

MK: And after all that, how do you feel when you are confronted with denial, which is becoming more and more persistent and wider, the denial of Srebrenica genocide?. Do you feel personally offended?

SF: I feel like it sets back society. I feel like it puts us in concrete boots that don't allow us to move forward. Any time we try to deny something that is real, whether in our personal lives or in society, we are not able to move forward. There is redemption. I believe in redemption. That's why I have a lot of respect for the people who pled guilty. Because in acknowledging what happened we can move forward. There is a path forward. It can be difficult, for sure. It can require a lot of emotional courage and it can require big, deep topics to have to come to the surface. But they fundamentally deal with who we are as human beings. When we deny facts and we deny these very painful things that happened, it prevents that kind of forward movement. So I think that in denying that 8000 men and boys were killed in July of 1995 it sets back and it holds in place a nation of people. And I think that's very unfortunate. To be able to create and talk about a future in a way that feels open and productive will require dealing with the facts. When I say 8000 men I do want to clarify that it's more than 7000 who were executed and murdered, and there were about a thousand who died while trying to flee, in the woods. I feel badly for deniers. It's hard to know how to start a conversation when there's an unwillingness to acknowledge the facts. I think one of the other big successes I mentioned early on of this team was our commitment to the facts.

MK: Thank you very much.

SF: You're welcome.